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The Church
and
The New Testament

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

The Close of the General Assembly

MAY 31, 1923

BY THE

Right Reverend the Moderator
GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D., D.C.L.
PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM,
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MCMXXIII

CLOSING ADDRESS

TO THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

MAY 31, 1923

Right Reverend and Right Honourable,—

The subject which I have chosen on which to address you is "The Church and the New Testament." And I have been led to do so on two grounds.

The first is that there is abundant evidence at the present time of a widespread interest amongst our more educated members in regard to questions affecting the origin, the interpretation, and the authority of the New Testament writings, and that consequently opportunities must be found of dealing with those questions as part of the general teaching function of the Church.

Nothing could be more unfortunate than that modern scholarship should be separated from the average belief of the Church's members. And if the Church is to keep her hold over the minds as well as the hearts of men, it can only be by sharing with them fully and frankly the best knowledge she can reach on the primary documents of her faith.

And, in the second place, this is rendered the more necessary because, with this revived interest in Biblical study, there is also mingled in many quarters a large amount of perplexity and apprehension. It is widely known that the old way of regarding the inspiration and the authority of the sacred volume has, in many respects, undergone a great change, and that questions have been raised regarding the authorship and structure of its several books which are at first sight strangely at variance with the traditional positions.

So long as these inquiries were confined to the Old Testament, the anxiety was not so grave, but when they were extended to the New Testament, and especially to the Four Gospels, it seemed to many that a sacrilegious hand was being laid on the Word of God, and that the continued acceptance of that Word as the norm of faith and practice was being seriously imperilled.

The burden which is laid upon those who are called upon to prove themselves "discreet and

learned" ministers of the Word is thus a heavy one. And it may not be out of place for one whose studies have for many years been occupied with the history and literature of the New Testament, and on whom there has been laid the responsible task of instructing the future religious teachers and guides of the people in its form and contents, to try and bring before you certain particulars regarding the manner in which the New Testament came into being, the history of its various books, and the essential character of its message. Necessarily this can be done only in briefest outline, but I hope at least to be able to show that, judged by the strictest methods of historical interpretation, the New Testament is still, and that too in an enhanced degree, the same book of life that it was to our fathers.

I.

In doing so, it is well to remind ourselves at the very outset of the obvious, but constantly forgotten, fact that there was a Church before there was a New Testament. The New Testament writings are not the cause, but the product of the faith of the first Christian believers. Christianity did not begin, as other faiths have begun, by being a book religion. The only time when we hear of our Lord's writing was when

> "He stooped
> And wrote upon the unrecording ground."

And when the time came for His followers to carry on His work in the world, it was not by the promulgation of creeds or theological treatises, but by the power of personal witness, that they made disciples of all the nations. Their witness was the simplest, the most direct possible—witness which owed its power to the fact that it came from those who had already felt the living power of Christianity in their own experience. They had the witness in themselves. What they had seen and heard that they declared, that others might share with them in their fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (*cf.* 1 John i. 3).

This is not to say, of course, that fragmentary records of our Lord's life and work did not exist from a very early date. In view of the new evidence which we now possess of the widespread use of writing at the time, it is more than probable that, in addition to the *Testimonia*, or compilations of Messianic Oracles from the Old Testament, which first engaged the attention of the early Christians,[1] collections of Christ's own words were in existence during His lifetime,[2] and that the first account of His Crucifixion may have been written in the very year in which He died.[3] But, apart from such frag-

[1] See especially J. Rendel Harris, *Testimonies*, Parts i. and ii. (Camb. Univ. Press, 1916 and 1920).

[2] G. Salmon, *Human Element in the Gospels* (London, 1907), p. 274.

[3] W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (London, 1904), pp. 5 f.

mentary records, it was mainly on oral tradition and oral teaching that, in the first years of her existence, the Christian Church depended alike for purposes of edification and of missionary effort. We are thus met with the paradox that precisely in what we are accustomed to describe as New Testament times there was no New Testament.

This state of things could not continue. With the growth and dispersion of Christian communities, there arose naturally the need of further instruction in the faith, of rebuke against prevailing error, and of warning against strange and heretical teaching. Accordingly the way was prepared for authoritative written documents by which these needs could be met.

Nor was it to be wondered at that these documents should, in the first instance, take the form of Epistles or Letters. A letter is the most direct of all forms of writing. And nothing, therefore, was more natural than that, in pursuance of an old Jewish practice, St Paul and his fellow-labourers should fall back upon letters to carry those greetings and exhortations to the Churches which, owing to stress of work or distance, they were unable to address face to face.

The Gospels were not long in following. If we can accept the dates which certain recent criticism is inclined to assign, the first of them (St Mark) must have been written very shortly after the earliest Pauline Epistles—that is, in

the fifth decade of the first century. And if this is thought to be too early, there are strong grounds for believing that all the Gospels, with the exception of the fourth, were in existence before 70 A.D.—that is, within little more than a generation after the Death of Christ.

Other Christian writings were also in circulation by this time, such as the many narratives to which St Luke refers in his preface; and the number would be largely increased during the second century by the production of what we now know as Apocryphal or Uncanonical Gospels, designed to meet the popular desire for fuller information regarding the life and teaching of Jesus.

It is clear, indeed, that for a considerable time the early Christians continued to make use of writings which were afterwards excluded from our New Testament Canon, such as the so-called *Gospel of Peter*, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Pilgrim's Progress* of the early Church, which is actually found appended to one of our principal New Testament manuscripts (the Codex Sinaiticus).

The story of the former is so instructive that we may linger over it for a minute or two.

According to Eusebius, the father of Church history (*H.E.*, vi. 12), Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, towards the close of the second century, on the occasion of an episcopal visit to the Church

of Rhossos in Cilicia, found that the brethren there were in the habit of using a gospel ascribed to St Peter in their services. He expressed his doubts as to the advisability of such a practice, but did not press his objections, apparently through ignorance of the book's actual contents. Later, a copy of the gospel came into the bishop's hands, and on examination he found that, while generally reproducing "the right teaching of the Saviour," it contained certain unwarranted "additions." Accordingly he announced his speedy return to Rhossos, evidently with the object of putting a stop to its further use in the services of the Church.

Up till quite recently this was practically all that we knew of this Petrine gospel, but in 1886, by one of the romances of archæology, a large fragment of it was discovered by the French Archæological Mission at Akhmîm in Egypt. Into the many questions raised by this fragment we cannot now enter, beyond noting that it makes clear that the "additions" which Serapion had detected were of a decidedly unscriptural character, teaching only the seeming sufferings of Christ, or what was known in the early Church as the heresy of Docetism. We are thus confronted with the surprising fact that at a time when, as the fragment itself proves, our Four Gospels had gained a commanding position in the Church, a Christian community was in the

habit of reading publicly yet another gospel tainted with heretical views.[1]

This can hardly have been an isolated case, and the use of Uncanonical Gospels must have been fairly widely extended, to judge from the numerous fragments which have come down to us.

But what more immediately concerns us at present is that a process of selection was already at work in the Church, and that only writings which met such tests as the preservation of the words of Jesus, or genuine Apostolical origin, were stamped with the special mark of inspired authority. Not even yet were these writings, whether we think of Gospels or Epistles, accounted "Holy Writ" in the same sense as the books of the Old Testament, but they were gradually coming to be so regarded, and were freely read and copied as constituting the bedrock of authentic Christian tradition.

"What manner of things lie in your case?" said the Proconsul to a North African Christian, Speratus, about 180 A.D. And the answer was, "Books and Epistles of Paul, a just man."[2] It is not easy to say what is meant by the general designation "Books," but, in addition to the Books of the Law, it may well have included the

[1] Pseudo-Peter is dated by Professor C. H. Turner (*The Study of the New Testament*, Oxford, 1920, p. 13) within the limits 115–140 A.D.

[2] *Passio Sanctorum Scilitanorum*, ed. J. A. Robinson in *Texts and Studies*, I. ii. p. 114: "Libri et epistulae Pauli uiri iusti." The later Greek version is somewhat longer: *αἱ καθ' ἡμᾶς βίβλοι καὶ αἱ προσεπιτούτοις ἐπιστολαὶ Παύλου τοῦ ὁσίου ἀνδρός.*

Gospels, which, along with the Epistles of St Paul, were treasured in the archives of the Church for public reading and edification.

In this way, then, by a gradual process of ratification and elimination, our New Testament began to take definite form. By the end of the second century it embraced substantially the writings which it now contains, and in the Muratorian Fragment on the Canon—the earliest list of New Testament books which has come down to us—we find the Gospels, the Acts, the Pauline Epistles (without the Epistle to the Hebrews), the Apocalypse, and two, if not three, of the Johannine Epistles, all explicitly recognised, while various heretical works are rejected; "for," it is said, "it is not fitting that gall should be mingled with honey (fel enim cum melle misceri non concruit)." [1]

For a time thereafter—and this is the distinguishing feature of the next stage of the New Testament's history—the exact limits to be set to the Canon were the subjects of controversy. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, was received with a certain amount of hesitation in various quarters, owing to doubts regarding its Apostolic origin. And a similar state of feeling with reference to the Apocalypse was widely prevalent, owing to the strange character of its

[1] The Fragment is named after its discoverer, Muratori, by whom it was published in 1740. For the full text and translation, see the present writer's *The New Testament Documents* (London, 1913), pp. 286 ff.

teaching. But by degrees all such difficulties and doubts were set at rest, and by the end of the fourth century the New Testament as we know it, our Divine library of twenty-seven writings, came to occupy the same place under the New Covenant which the Jewish Scriptures occupied under the Old. And what is very significant, this final selection, so gradually arrived at, was due to no decree of a General Council, or, indeed, to external authority of any kind, but to the *consensus sanctorum*, the general consciousness of the Christian Church, and the practice of the whole body of the faithful.

As these writings had come into existence to satisfy the Church's immediate needs by supplying her with the means of carrying on her own work and of meeting attacks from without, so now the Church, which first called them into being, collected them together with their Old Testament predecessors in what Tertullian calls "the whole Instrument of both Testaments." For it is significant of the authority now attaching to our New Testament books that it was under the juristic title *Instrumentum*—the record in a legal case, the document which could be appealed to in proof of certain statements—that they were at first known in the West. Gradually *Testamentum*, as a convenient rendering of the Greek word for "covenant," took its place, and the familiar title *Novum Testamentum* (New Testament) passed into general use, implying,

according to the unknown writer who was apparently the first to use it, "the doctrines or precepts . . . which it is impossible for one who has chosen to live according to the Gospel either to increase or to diminish." [1]

Looking back upon our New Testament during these, the first three hundred years of its history, we have found (1) a number of writings of varied character, whose "most striking marvel," in the words of a great scholar, "is the perfect fitness which they exhibit for fulfilling an office of which their writers appear themselves to have had no conception"; [2] (2) the gradual formation of a Canon or list of these writings, which came eventually to occupy the place in the Christian Church which the Old Testament held in the Jewish and early Christian Church; and (3) the increasing recognition of these writings, or, as Athanasius terms them, "springs of salvation," as in a special sense the life-giving Word of God, "so that he that is thirsty can fill himself with the (divine) responses in them; in these alone is the teaching of true religion proclaimed; let no one add to them, or take away aught of them." [3]

[1] Eusebius, *H.E.*, v. 16. 3. It is interesting to notice that Erasmus revived the designation *Instrumentum* in the first editions of his Greek Testament.

[2] B. F. Westcott, *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, vi. (Macmillan, 1881), pp. 166 f.

[3] *Festal Letter*, xxxix. (367 A.D.). For full text and translation see A. Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (London, 1913), pp. 213 ff.

We must pass over our New Testament's history during the next thousand years, noting only that Jerome's inclusion of these twenty-seven writings in the Vulgate, which was during practically the whole of that period the Bible of Western Christendom, still further confirmed the selection, whose acceptance was rendered obligatory on the Roman Catholic Church by the decree of the Church of Trent in 1546.

Nor did Luther and the other Reformers propose any change in this long-established Canon, though they discussed the right of certain books to appear in it with a freedom for which we are hardly prepared. For Luther, indeed, the one test for any book was whether it showed Christ, for "that which does not teach Christ is still not Apostolic, even if it were the teaching of St Peter or St Paul." [1] And it was its failure, as he thought, to meet this test, and the absence of his favourite doctrine of Justification by Faith, which led him to characterise the Epistle of St James as "a right strawy Epistle . . . for it has no character of the Gospel in it." [2]

John Calvin applies the same personal standard, and, like Luther, finds the seat of authority, not in the Church, but in Scripture, as the voice of

[1] Cited by B. F. Westcott, *On the Canon of the New Testament*, v. (Macmillan, 1881), p. 482.

[2] *Ib.*, p. 481.

God Himself. "If we wish to make provision for consciences, so as to keep them from being agitated in perpetual doubt, we must take the authority of the Scriptures as higher than human reasoning or proofs or conjectures. In other words, we must found it on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. . . . Being then illuminated by His power, we believe, not on our own judgment nor on the judgment of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but above all human judgment, we decide beyond dispute that they were given us from the very mouth of God, just as if with the eye we were contemplating in them the essence of God." [1]

And to the same effect we may recall the "advice" of the Westminster Confession of 1648, which, after enumerating the books of the New Testament in the order in which we find them in our English Bibles, as "given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life," proceeds to recall "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof," as arguments whereby Scripture "doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding our full persuasion and

[1] *Institutes*, Book I., chap. vii.

assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts" (Chap. I. v.).

No words could bring out better the commanding claims of our New Testament writings, but the very degree of authority which is thus assigned to them makes it the more imperative that we should study them with all the best resources within our reach.

It is true, and we shall return to the point again, that, in what concerns the essence of Revelation, only the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirits can make the word a living word in our hearts. But it is none the less true that, as it was the sense of the sovereign worth of the different books of Scripture that first led the early Church to gather them together in the Sacred Canon, so now, for the same reason, the Church is called upon to devote herself to their interpretation in accordance with the living and growing needs of the age. And in this work of interpretation criticism is an all-important factor.

It is unfortunate, perhaps, that we have to use the word criticism at all in this connection. To those who are not familiar with its root-meaning, it is apt to suggest a superior fault-finding attitude, and to mark off the scholars who apply its methods into a class by themselves. But the word has become too firmly imbedded

in usage to be lightly dismissed, nor is it easy to find another which expresses so well the discriminating attitude of the true New Testament student, with his mind freed as far as possible from all presuppositions, open to receive the light from whatsoever source it may come, and supremely jealous of the right of our sacred books to be understood along the lines of their own history and teaching.

In the words of one of the greatest of New Testament scholars of recent years, the saintliness of whose character was no less remarkable than the extent and accuracy of his learning, the late Bishop Westcott: "The Biblical critic approaches the Scriptures from their literary side by the same methods as he would approach any other ancient writings, if with more scrupulous care and a more present sense of his responsibility. He examines their history with the frankest study of all available evidence, external and internal; he determines their interpretation with a watchful regard to the circumstances under which they were composed; he sees in them, in a word, a true monument of human experience through which the Spirit of God spoke and speaks to men." [1] And in accepting," as the same writer remarks elsewhere, "without the least misgiving, the canon that the Bible must be interpreted 'like any other book,'" the critic finds his reward in this, that "by the use of this

[1] *Lessons from Work* (London, 1901), p. 177.

reverent freedom he becomes assured with a conviction rational and unmovable, that it is not like any other book." [1]

II.

It is, of course, impossible in the time at our disposal to attempt even to summarise the more positive results that have been reached by New Testament criticism; but I would ask your indulgence if, following the familiar classification—

1. Textual Criticism, and
2. Literary and Historical Criticism,

I attempt to say a few words about these disciplines, in the hope of making clearer their value for the fuller understanding of our New Testament writings.

1. Textual Criticism.

We have seen already the nature of the process by which our New Testament came into being, and the unique place which it occupies in the Church of to-day. But no sooner have we done so than the question inevitably arises, What security have we that we possess our New Testament in its original form? A period of upwards of eighteen hundred years separates us from the

[1] *Some Lessons of the Revised Version of the New Testament* (London, 1897) p. 6.

Apostolic autographs, and during more than three-fourths of that time the text of our New Testament books was exposed to all the dangers which come from copying by hand.

It was inevitable in these circumstances that many variations and errors should arise. And the task of Textual Criticism, working with all the rich materials—manuscripts, versions, quotations—at its command, is to get behind these, and to recover as nearly as possible the words of the first writers. The inquiry is one of great intricacy and delicacy, but it is indispensable if we are to have full confidence that the text of our New Testament writings is before us in the purest, most accurate form possible. And those who have acquainted themselves with the history of the science will be the first to pay a tribute of gratitude to the long line of patient workers into whose labours we have entered.

Of these labours, so far as the early Church Fathers are concerned, I can say nothing, and I must equally pass over in silence the long period when the Latin Vulgate ruled supreme, and the very existence of a Greek original was in many quarters wholly ignored. But with the Revival of Letters in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a new impetus was given to Greek learning. "Greece," in the often-quoted phrase, "arose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand" (Goldwin Smith), and the man to whom this was primarily due was Erasmus,

who in 1516 issued the first printed Greek Testament. The effect, in the words of the historian Froude, was "a spiritual earthquake." [1]

No doubt, owing to the fewness and lateness of the Greek manuscripts which Erasmus consulted, and the haste with which the printing was carried through, the text was marked by many imperfections, but at least it broke down the supremacy so long attached to the Latin Version, and made the New Testament message itself, or rather Him to whom that message pointed, the final court of appeal.

"These holy pages," so Erasmus concludes the Exhortation prefixed to his text, "will summon up the living image of His mind. They will give you Christ Himself, talking, healing, dying, rising, the whole Christ in a word; they will give Him to you in an intimacy so close that He would be less visible to you if He stood before your eyes." The Christ thus made known is also a Christ intended for all. "For I utterly dissent," so Erasmus writes in the same noble document, "from those who are unwilling that the sacred Scriptures should be read by the unlearned translated into their vulgar tongue. . . . I wish that even simple women (*mulierculæ*) should read the Gospels, should read the Epistles of St Paul. Would that the Scriptures were translated into all languages, that they might be read and known, not only by Scots and

[1] *Life and Letters of Erasmus* (London, 1895), p. 127.

Irishmen, but also by Turks and Saracens. I long," he continues in words that were afterwards echoed by William Tindale, the man to whom more than to any other we owe our English Bible, "that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveller should beguile with their stories the tedium of his journey."

The main significance, however, of Erasmus's text in our present inquiry is that, after passing through various revisions at his own hands and those of his successors, it was generally accepted as the standard text, and as such formed the basis of the Authorised Version of 1611.[1] But notwithstanding the widespread welcome thus accorded to it, both then and in certain quarters still, this text can no longer be accepted as authoritative, in view of the imperfect character of the evidence on which it rests.[2]

To mention only one point. Our two best manuscripts of the Greek New Testament were not then available. One, the Vatican Codex, was to all intents and purposes out of reach in the Vatican Library in Rome. The other, the

[1] The actual phrase *Textus Receptus* apparently occurs first in the Preface to the second Elzevir edition (1633): "Textum ergo habes nunc ab omnibus receptum."

[2] Professor C. H. Turner is still more emphatic: "The *Textus receptus* is as dead as Queen Anne" (*Study of the New Testament*, p. 49).

Sinaitic Codex, lay still undiscovered in the Convent of St Catherine on Mount Sinai. But since they, and a host of other documentary authorities of hardly less value, have come into the hands of critics, amazing progress has been made, culminating in the epoch-making Westcott-Hort text, which corresponds in all essential particulars with the text followed in the Revised Version of 1881.

For a time, indeed, it seemed as if the last word in the textual criticism of the New Testament had been spoken, and the Cambridge editors' claim of having got back to the "original Greek" had been made good. But in recent years there has been a growing tendency to dispute this conclusion, mainly on the ground that Westcott and Hort, in their zeal for what they termed the "Neutral" type of text, have not paid sufficient attention to the widely diffused and very remarkable "Western" type of text.

No argument as to the relative merits of these types can be attempted here, but it is interesting to recall the fresh support the "Western" text has been receiving from recent discoveries.

Two examples must suffice.

The first is a fourth- or fifth-century Greek manuscript of the Gospels, to be known in future as Codex Washington or W., which was found a few years ago in a ruined monastery in Egypt, and which, besides showing the Gospels in the

Western order—Matthew, John, Luke, Mark,—supplies many interesting variant readings, along with a Greek version of certain additional verses in the closing chapter of St Mark, hitherto known only from a Latin rendering in Jerome's treatise against the Pelagians.[1]

The second is a palimpsest copy of the Four Gospels in Syriac, discovered (like so many other Biblical treasures) at the monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai, by the energy of two Cambridge ladies, which possesses the absorbing interest of coming to us in the tongue most closely related to the Aramaic, in which our Lord's teaching was first given, while the original from which it is copied may well go back to a date separated by little more than half a century from the last of our Greek Canonical Gospels.[2]

Until there has been time for a closer study of these and similar documents, it is vain to talk of finality having been reached in our New Testament text. But this is certain, that the number of doubtful readings of any importance has been very much reduced, hardly amounting, says Dr Hort, "to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament." Or, if that seems to any one a rather sanguine calculation, he need have no difficulty in accepting the same critic's further assurance that "in the variety

[1] See further Milligan, *New Testament Documents*, pp. 277 ff.

[2] An interesting popular account of the palimpsest will be found in Mrs Lewis's *Light on the Four Gospels from the Sinai Palimpsest* (London, 1913).

and fulness of the evidence on which it rests the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings. . . . The expression of doubt whenever doubt is really felt is owing to the paramount necessity for fidelity as to the exact words of Scripture." [1]

2. Literary and Historical Criticism.

Apart, however, from the problem of text, there remain certain literary and historical questions which have a closer bearing upon the authenticity of our New Testament writings than is sometimes realised.

The "retrograde movement towards tradition," to use Harnack's phrase,[2] is a case in point. For it is reassuring, to say the least, to notice the growing agreement amongst scholars to settle such questions as authorship or date in close accord with the older traditional views. But this, be it noted, no longer in deference to mere outward authority, but as the result of the most thoroughgoing scientific inquiry.

For example, instead of the four Epistles which alone, some seventy years ago, Baur was willing to ascribe to St Paul, nine are now gene-

[1] *The New Testament in the Original Greek.* Smaller edition, p. 565.

[2] "Wir sind in der Kritik der Quellen des ältesten Christenthums ohne Frage in einer rückläufigen Bewegung zur Tradition" (*Chronologie der Altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius*, i., Leipzig, 1897, Vorrede, p. x.).

rally accepted as his undoubted work, to which many scholars are prepared to add as a tenth the Epistle to the Ephesians.

The question of the Pastoral Epistles is admittedly more difficult, but the Pauline authorship is defended in what is probably the most thoroughgoing commentary in English, that published by Dr St John Parry at the Cambridge University Press; and only the other day, so careful and learned a Church historian as Professor C. H. Turner stated in his opening address as Dean Ireland's Professor of Exegesis in the University of Oxford, that he did not think it too much to say that, "on historical grounds," these Epistles offered "no serious stumbling-blocks." [1]

Further, in judging the linguistic arguments which Dr Harrison in a recent brilliant study [2] has brought against direct Pauline authorship, we must keep in view that arguments based solely on vocabulary are always precarious, and that more weight than Dr Harrison seems inclined to allow may well be given to the many-sided personality of St Paul, to the change in his circumstances and environment, to the difference of subjects with which he is dealing, and possibly also to his having given on this occasion a greater freedom to his amanuensis. Nor must we forget that many who are unwilling to accept

[1] *Study of the New Testament*, p. 20.

[2] *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (Oxford, 1921).

the Epistles in their present form as the work of St Paul admit that they embody certain genuine *personalia*, fragments of letters or messages which came from the Apostle's own hand.

Passing from the Epistles to the Gospels, there can be for us few more important inquiries than, How did these, the primary authorities of our Faith, come into being? What are the sources on which their writers depended for their information? What, in consequence, is the measure of credibility to be attached to their narratives? On all these points criticism, proceeding along the usual lines of literary investigation, has much of importance to tell us. Thus it has established practically beyond doubt the priority of St Mark's Gospel and its dependence on the recollections supplied by the Apostle Peter in keeping with the early Papias tradition.[1] And it has shown that with St Mark the later Synoptists combined a second source, made up principally of discourses, but generally known under the non-committal name of Q (from the first letter of the German *Quelle*, a source), which goes back to a very early date, possibly to the lifetime of our Lord Himself. With the aid of those two sources, then, the Petrine *Memorabilia* and Q, the evangelists are put practically into the position of eye-witnesses, and our reliance on the historic trustworthiness of their narratives as good and true records is correspondingly in-

[1] Eusebius, *H.E.*, iii. 39. 15.

creased. In particular, the old charges of idealised fiction or dogmatic bias, at one time so freely brought against them, are no longer worthy of serious attention. Rather, as we study the simple direct portraiture of their central Figure, so far above the heads of His reporters, it is to find—

> "That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
> Or decomposes but to recompose,
> Become my universe that feels and knows."

As regards the only strictly historical book in the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, we may take it as now fully established that it was the work of the third Evangelist, St Luke, and that in writing it he again made use of earlier documents—one, in particular, which may have been written originally in Aramaic, containing materials dealing with the first thirty years of the Church's history,[1] and another, a travel-diary, on which he depended for his account of the Pauline journeys. We have thus ample guarantees of the writer's intimate knowledge of the facts narrated, while contemporary inscriptional evidence has established in a remarkable way his accuracy in such testing particulars as geographical references and political titles, on

[1] In Harvard Theological Studies I., *The Composition and Date of Acts* (Cambridge (Mass.), 1916), Professor C. C. Torrey has developed the theory that the first part of Acts is the verbatim translation of a single Aramaic document. His view is criticised by Professor F. C. Burkitt, *Journal of Theological Studies*, xx. (1919), pp. 320 ff.

which a writer of a later generation would almost inevitably have blundered.[1]

The exact date of Acts is still a matter of discussion, but it has been pushed back further and further from the late second-century date once assigned to it, and the probabilities are all in favour of a date in the sixth decade of the first century, perhaps as early as 64 A.D., and therefore contemporary with the events recorded in the last chapter.

I wish that one could speak with the same degree of confidence with regard to the extraordinarily difficult questions raised by the Johannine literature, but "only those," as Canon Streeter remarks, "who have merely trifled with the problems it suggests are likely to speak dogmatically upon the subject." [2]

Great names can still be quoted in support of the authorship by John the son of Zebedee, and even where this is not conceded, there is a widespread feeling that he must have had a connection with the Gospel so close as virtually to lend it the full force of Apostolic authority.

[1] Sir William M. Ramsay, in *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (London, 1915), speaks of Acts xiii.-xxi. as capable of bearing "the most minute scrutiny as an authority for the facts of the Ægean world," and as "written with such judgmen , skill, art, and perception of truth as to be a model of historical statement" (p. 85). According to Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Engl. Tr., London, 1909), p. xv. : "Direct touch with the recorded facts—this alone explains such a history as lies before us in the 'Acts of the Apostles.'"

[2] *Foundations* (London, 1914), p. 82.

It is certainly difficult to understand how a Gospel, differing in so many particulars from its Synoptic predecessors, could ever have been accepted and canonised by the Church at all, unless it had been known to come from one who had an indefeasible right to speak, and who, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," could interpret, as no one else could, the mind and the heart of his Master.

Dr Burney, in his important study on *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, published last year, prefers to see in this disciple not John the Apostle, but John the Presbyter, whom he pictures as a Jew of Jerusalem, a youthful follower of Christ, who, in view of his scholastic training, was better able to understand the real drift of his Master's teaching than the Galilæan Apostles. Readers must judge for themselves the weight of the arguments by which this view is supported; but it is at least a new testimony to the growing belief in the essentially Palestinian, rather than Hellenistic, origin and character of the Gospel, and its consequent right to be regarded as a reliable historical authority for the events and teaching of our Lord.[1]

[1] Mention may be made in this connection of the wholly unbiassed conclusion of Eduard Meyer in his *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, i. pp. 318 f. (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1921), that the author's conception of the Logos is derived from Palestinian Jewish sources (the "Memra" teaching), and not from Greek philosophy: see C. Gore, *Belief in Christ* (London, 1922), p. 107, and *contra*, Professor F. C. Burkitt's review in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, xxiv. (1923), pp. 158 f., of an article by Professor G. F. Moore in the *Harvard Theological Review*, Jan. 1922, entitled "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology (Memra, Shekinah, Metatron)."

"Christ manifested in remembrance,"[1] in accordance with the promised teaching of the Holy Spirit, to which its author points, is the theme. Or, in the words put into the mouth of the dying John himself in Browning's great poem, "A Death in the Desert," in some ways the best commentary we have on the Fourth Gospel—

> "What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars."

The "points," the simple facts of the three "bodily" Gospels, have become the "stars" of their "spiritual" successor, the Fourth Gospel.

> "To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death
> Of which I wrote 'it was'—to me, it is;
> Is, here and now: I apprehend nought else."[2]

The Apocalypse brings us face to face with yet another set of problems, some of which have been helped by the better knowledge of Apoca-

[1] Newman, *Parochial Sermons*, iv., Serm. 17.

[2] An interesting example of the way in which a disciple may recreate, many years after, the conversation of a beloved master is given by the Rev. D. C. Somervell in his *Short History of our Religion* (London, 1922), pp. 106 f. "In 1920 Mr Bruce Glasier published a book on William Morris, who died twenty-five years before. He writes: 'I have found that my memory is, on many occasions, subject to what seems to be a sort of "illumination" or "inspiration." Thus when I have fixed my mind on one, say, of the incidents recalled in these chapters, the scene has begun to unfold itself, perhaps slowly at first, but afterwards rapidly and clearly. Meditating upon it for a time, I have lifted my pen and begun to write. Then, to my surprise, the conversations, long buried or hidden somewhere in my memory, have come back to me sometimes with the greatest fulness, word for word, as we say. Nay, not only the words, but the tones, the pauses, and the gestures of the speaker.'"

lyptic literature in general, which we owe to Archdeacon Charles and his fellow-workers. Others, relating to the peculiarities of language and grammar which the book presents, have of late been discussed in connection with the new light thrown on the common Greek of the time by the Egyptian papyri. Professor J. H. Moulton, for example, in his epoch-making *Prolegomena*, suggested that, "apart from places where he [the writer of the Apocalypse] may be definitely translating a Semitic document, there is no reason to believe that his grammar would have been materially different had he been a native of Oxyrhynchus [speaking therefore the ordinary vernacular Greek of his day], assuming the extent of Greek education the same." [1] And a similar conclusion has been reached on independent lines by Dean Armitage Robinson.[2]

Whether this explanation taken by itself is sufficient to account for the Greek of the Apocalypse with its "Grammar of Ungrammar" [3] may be open to question, but it certainly deserves to be taken into account in the discussion of a

[1] *Grammar of New Testament Greek*,[3] (Edinburgh, 1908), i. *Prolegomena*, p. 9: cf. the statement by the same writer in *Cambridge Biblical Essays* (London, 1909), p. 489: "The assumption of occasional or frequent lapse from correct grammar, in the writing of a foreigner who attained complete fluency in the secondary language but never grasped its grammar well enough to write correctly by instinct, is true to everyday experience, and paralleled all along the line by the phenomena of the papyri, due to the same cause."

[2] *Journal of Theological Studies*, x. (1909), p. 10.

[3] E. M. Benson, *The Apocalypse* (London, 1900), p. 131.

literary problem which has agitated the minds of critics from Dionysius of Alexandria in the middle of the third century down to the present day. And even if it does nothing else, it may at least remind us of the bearing of the papyri upon the study of the language of the New Testament. Let me indicate very shortly the nature of that bearing.

By the time the New Testament came to be written, Attic Greek in its original purity had long since disappeared, and its place had been taken by a more cosmopolitan tongue which, having Attic for its basis, had been simplified and popularised, and so adapted for what was, at the time, practically a world-wide use. For our knowledge of this late Greek we have been mainly dependent in the past upon its literary memorials. But now in the non-literary papyri, we can see it as it were in undress, as it was spoken and written in familiar and informal intercourse by the ordinary men and women of the day. And the striking fact for our present purpose is, that these non-literary texts prove conclusively that it was in this same colloquial Greek—the κοινή, or common tongue of the day —that the writers of the New Testament for the most part composed their books. Themselves sprung from the common people, the disciples of One whom the common people heard gladly, they in their turn wrote in that common tongue to be "understanded of the people."

This is not to deny, of course, that much of the New Testament vocabulary was deepened and enriched by the new conditions into which it had been baptised, and that for the proper understanding of many of its characteristic words and phrases we must often fall back upon the light derivable from within the New Testament itself. Nor, again, can we forget that, notwithstanding its directness and homeliness, the New Testament contains elements of a distinctly literary character—that it is itself literature. But this does not alter the fact that it spoke to those to whom it was first addressed in the current speech of its time, and that in its English dress the translators have managed so to reproduce the "splendid simplicity" of the original, as again to bring it within the reach of all—

> "Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
> Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
> And those wild eyes that watch the waves
> In roarings round the coral reef."

"It's line," to adapt the familiar verse of the Psalms, "is gone out through all the earth, and its words to the end of the world" (Psalm xix. 4).

III.

To the historical study, then, of the New Testament, the little book which contains all the best wisdom of the world, and has exerted a greater

influence than any other book that has ever been written, we, as students and teachers, are called. It is impossible, of course, for all to devote themselves to the close scientific research which some of the problems to which I have been alluding demand; but in Jowett's dictum, "Doubt comes in at the window when Inquiry is denied at the door," and all can at least seek to familiarise themselves with the most firmly established results of historical criticism, and so share in the deepened interest and stronger faith which it brings with it.

For surely it is no longer necessary to point out that a man may hold firmly by critical methods and critical results without ceasing to be a devout Christian believer. It may be perfectly true, as some one has wittily said, that what people require is not bread-knives, but bread. And yet even the knife of the critic may have its use, if it succeeds in presenting the substance on which it works in such a form as will most commend it to those for whom it is intended.

It has always been the proud boast of the Church of Scotland that its ministry is a learned ministry, and there was never greater need for such a ministry than there is to-day. I do not for a moment forget the varied and absorbing practical calls that are made upon our ministers, or the difficulty, more particularly in our city parishes, of finding time for systematic study.

But such time must be found if from our pulpits and class-rooms the Word of the Lord is to be "trumpeted forth" (*cf.* 1 Thess. i. 8) with no uncertain voice to meet the "obstinate questionings," "the blank misgivings" of the age.

On all sides we are being called upon to give "a reason concerning the hope that is in us" (1 Pet. iii. 15). Intellectual frugality will no longer pass muster. And if the "fair deposit" (2 Tim. i. 14) which has been entrusted to us is to be turned to its highest account, we must show ourselves, in the words of the old *agraphon*, ascribed to our Lord Himself, "good money-changers," scrutinising with anxious care everything bearing on the title-deeds of our Faith, without for a moment losing sight of the living realities to which these title-deeds point. In Erasmus's striking phrase, with a "curiosa pietas" there should be combined a "pia curiositas"; religious reverence and scientific curiosity must go hand in hand.

No doubt this "curiosity" has at times been pushed to undue limits, and legitimate criticism has suffered in consequence. But, as a recent historian of the movement pertinently remarks, "the sins of critics no more impair the authority of criticism than the sins of Churchmen impair the right of the Church to exist."[1] What is wanted is not less but better criticism, a criticism

[1] Nash, *The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament* (Macmillan, 1900), p. 182.

which is not impatient of traditional views simply because they are old, and which shows a ready willingness to look at all sides of a question. "I wish," said the greatest of modern textual critics, Professor Hort, with reference to a brilliant predecessor, "he would give himself time to consider possible alternatives."

The warning is still required, if only in view of the magnitude of the issues involved, and the consequent necessity of testing results by the experience of more than one generation.

"*Securi exspectant filii lucis.*"

The sons of light await all issues with calm. And the book which has proved to so many

"The fountain-light of all their day,
A master-light of all their seeing,"

can only reveal its hidden treasures to those who surrender themselves to the gradual and progressive leading of the Spirit, who has been sent to guide "into all the truth" (John xvi. 13).

We cannot, of course, shut our eyes to the fact that certain of the results of modern critical study must necessarily in the first instance be attended with a sense of personal loss, and that there is need of great care and prudence in familiarising our people with them. Scholars have been too apt to forget this, and to imagine that conclusions which seem to them self-obvious should at once commend themselves to those who have not enjoyed the same training in critical

methods, or who have not been able to follow each step in the process by which these conclusions have been reached.

Nor can we forget that there are many earnest and conscientious men who, after anxious thought and inquiry, have in all sincerity found themselves obliged to cling to the traditional views of Scripture, and to regard any suggestions of ignorance or inaccuracy on the part of its writers as wholly dishonouring to God's Word.

But what may be allowed in the case of individuals is impossible in these days as regards the Church at large. The Church, as we have seen, has received as its rule and ultimate standard of Faith not a single authoritative declaration, but a series of historical documents embodying the varied religious experience of God's people during a long period of years, which can only, therefore, be fully understood when interpreted in the light of the circumstances which called them forth.

This means study—study from the nature of the case full of difficulties, but study, above all else, which can make no progress unless it is conceived and carried out in a spirit of freedom. "To tell a man to study," wrote a great Church leader, Archbishop Tait, "and yet bid him, under heavy penalties, to come to the same conclusions with those who have not studied, is to mock him. If the conclusions are prescribed, the study is

precluded." [1] And the question that is pressing upon us as Christian ministers and teachers is how best to bridge over the gap which undoubtedly exists at present between the legitimate inferences of modern historical research and the views of our ordinary uninstructed and, it is to be feared, too often indifferent Church members. It is a gap that cannot be allowed to continue, and, in the very nature of things, will not continue. Critical conclusions will insist on forcing themselves forward, and if Christian people do not learn them from their accredited teachers, they will undoubtedly learn them from other, and, it may well be, hostile sources of information, in which naturally the main stress will be laid on their more negative and destructive aspects, without due regard to the corresponding gains. "The danger to-day is," so it has been wisely said, "not that the clergyman, in trying to solve difficulties, shall only suggest them, but that, by studiously avoiding them, he shall suggest that no solution exists." [2]

Why should the Church leave it to openly non-Christian newspapers and reviews to tell the people that the Bible, in the fine Rabbinical

[1] *Life*, i. p. 291. I may add the words of Tait's biographer, the present Archbishop of Canterbury, in his Second Visitation Charge (Macmillan, 1922), p. 49: "I believe unreservedly that it is the duty of every man to pursue unflinchingly the search for truth, and to free himself so far as he can from narrowing and fettering preconceptions as to the conclusions to which his search will lead him."

[2] B. H. Streeter, *Restatement and Reunions* (London, 1914), p. xxii.

phrase, "speaks in the tongue of the children of men," when she can also go on to prove, on the critics' own showing, that this, so far from obscuring the Divine element in Scripture, tends only to make that element more strongly felt? The "treasure" may be "in earthen vessels," but "the exceeding greatness of the power is of God" (2 Cor. iv. 7). And devout and spiritually-minded readers will quickly recognise that the very difficulties which criticism raises, and the errors into which it so often falls, are part of the Divine discipline by which God is leading His people, painfully it may be, but surely into ever clearer and higher knowledge of Himself and of His dealings with the world.

> "God's gift was that man should conceive of truth
> And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake
> As midway help till he reach fact indeed."

Scripture, as Bishop Butler pointed out long ago, may contain many truths as yet undiscovered, which will first be seen when the wants which they satisfy are widely felt. And a more recent occupant of the same historic see, Bishop Westcott, has placed on record his personal experience that "each fresh effort and each fresh difficulty has laid open, and lays open still, something hitherto unnoticed, which adds to the completeness of the apostolic records." [1]

Even then if we find that we are still a long

[1] *Lessons from Work*, p. 34.

way from being able to answer all the questions which the historical study of the New Testament raises, that is no reason why we should refrain from methods of investigation which are sound in themselves, and which, in other fields of inquiry, have been attended with great reward. "It is better to be lost in the quest of the Holy Grail than to have had no desire for the quest" (Bishop Knox). And it is for us to follow each gleam of light as it beckons us onwards, remembering, in Milton's noble words, that "to be still searching what was known not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it . . . is the golden rule in theology as in arithmetic."

What we want is more rather than less of the spirit which prompts Stevenson's quaint lines—

> "'O, I wad like to ken,' to the beggar-wife says I,
> 'The reason o' the cause, and the wherefore o' the why,
> Wi' mony anither riddle brings the tear into my e'e.'
> 'It's gey an' easy speirin',' says the beggar-wife to me."

And if to us as students the "reason" of many a "cause" and the "wherefore" of many a "why" is still hidden, it is only what our Lord Himself leads us to expect, as He reminds His disciples of the "many things" He has to say to them, when they are able to "bear" them (John xvi. 12).

Anything, at any rate, is better than "a torpor

of assurance," with its careless acceptance of ready-made religion and its failure to think out and work out the truth for itself. It is to the man who "is willing to do God's will" that the promise is given that he "shall know of the teaching whether it be of God" (John vii. 17). And earnest and open-minded inquiry inevitably brings with it that "freshness—a real getting at the heart of the matter, instead of dallying with the outside," to which Dr Sanday draws attention as the special need of Biblical study at the present time. "And I question," he continues, "if we shall get this in any better way than by approaching our task under the guidance of criticism and history—of criticism and history, not as too often dissevered from, but united with religion."

It may seem, perhaps, that what I have been saying involves a degree of uncertainty in our attitude towards the New Testament which is very unsettling, and that it would be easier and more comfortable to rest on the old method of proof-texts and the clearly defined and sternly logical systems which in the past have often been drawn from them. Easier and more comfortable it might certainly be! But it would deprive us of that sense of God's personal and direct dealing with men which the historical study of the New Testament ensures, and of that perception of God's righteousness and love which shines forth

with ever-increasing brightness as we trace the progressive manifestation of His purposes of grace.

Hence it is that the New Testament has its εὐαγγέλιον—its glad tidings—for all classes and conditions of men. In Coleridge's expressive phrase, it "*finds*" us in the very depths of our being, and so "bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit, even from the same Spirit, *which remaining in itself, yet regenerateth all other powers and in all ages entering into holy souls maketh them friends of God, and prophets* (Wisd. vii.)." [1]

For it is along this line, I venture to think, that the true meaning of the inspiration of the New Testament is to be sought. This consists neither in verbal infallibility, nor in any rule, however gracious, imposed authoritatively from without, but in "the peculiar energy and intensity of the *God-consciousness* apparent in the writers," [2] which led them first to learn and then declare "the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. iii. 10 f.).

It is not in a book but in a Life that the New Testament message culminates. "God," so the inspired writer sums up for us the whole method and purpose of Divine revelation, "having of

[1] *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (London, Moxon, 1863), p. 45.
[2] W. Sanday, Art. "Bible" in *D.R.E.*, ii. p. 577.

old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son" (Heb. i. 1 f.).

Therefore our Lord's familiar words are best understood when we see in them, not an injunction to "search the Scriptures," but a warning against searching them in the wrong way. "Ye search the Scriptures," so He rebukes those who in His day were making the Old Testament Scriptures an end in themselves, "because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me; and ye will not come to Me, that ye may have life" (John v. 39 f.). The written record, that is, forces us beyond itself to Him to whom it points —the Word who "became flesh and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth" (John i. 14). He — the God-Man Jesus — is the Key of the whole. To Him the whole Old Testament leads up; in Him the whole New Testament consists.

Πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

"Mohammed's truth lay in a holy Book,
Christ's in a sacred Life.

So, while the world rolls on from change to change
And realms of thought expand,
The Letter stands without expanse or range,
Stiff as a dead man's hand;

While, as the life-blood fills the growing form,
The Spirit Christ has shed
Flows through the ripening ages fresh and warm,
More felt than heard or read."

In the power then of that living Spirit let us return once more to the various ministries to which we have been called. And in doing so, let us carry with us not only the fresh confidence which comes from having taken counsel together as to the best means of prosecuting our work, but above all a keener sense of our responsibility to the living Word, who

"wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds,"

and who still speaks to us through His first "eye-witnesses and ministers" that we in our turn may "know the certain truth of what we have been taught" (Luke i. 4).

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in

love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (Eph. iii. 14-19).

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